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note

Hello readers!

My name is V and I recently adopted this story from Racer_101_452 (with permission :)).

I've always loved this storyline and I'm hoping I can live up to the orginal author's dreams and you reader's expectations. Please be warned that I have another book of my own that needs updating so these updates may be a bit slow, but I will try my best! And if you like, maybe you could check it out my own lion king books under my profile?

I hope you all enjoy!!

-V

one

"Ushari, now!" Scar screamed.

The serpent jumped from beneath the hot volcanic surface, his fangs injecting their poison deep into Kion's flesh. Too deep.

"Kion!" Fuli yelled as he fell to the floor away from Ushari who had fallen into the flames upon impact.

Even though Scar had just lost his most faithful follower, he continued to laugh. "Well, well, well, lion guard. Looks as though this plan worked out better than I had hoped for!" He said. "Kion will be dead within the day and nothing will stop me from taking back what is rightfully mine!"

"*Not just yet, Scar.*" A distant voice boomed from up above. Everyone looked up in wonder at the three figures in the clouds who had just appeared.

"Mufasa! Father, Mother!" Scar yelled out in surprise. "It- it can't be..."

"Go back to Hell, Scar, before we make you!" Mufasa comanded and Ahadi nodded in agreement. Uru watched in silence, her cloudy eyes filled with grief.

"Or what?" Scar asked spitefully. "You'll come down here and chase me off? Well, my dear family, I hate to-"

"Please, Taka," Uru spoke for the first time, her voice soft and gentle yet stern. For a moment, the lion guard thought the tyrant would listen, but yet again they thought wrong.

"I'm not Taka. That lion is dead." He said simply. The old queen looked away sadly, knowing what was to come.

"Very well, brother." Mufasa sighed. With a large thunderbolt and a lightning strike cutting through the clouds, the rain began to pour

down as though there was a bucket full of water being tipped over the edge of the heavens, and with one last cut-wrenching scream, the tyrant was gone.

"We won." Bunga said to no one in particular.

"We did, Little B." Beshte agreed with a smile.

"Guys!" Fuli called out from the ledge where she lay beside Kion. "What are we going to do?"

Ono flew down and landed next to the feline pair. "We have to get him back to Pride Rock."

two

"Come on, Beshte! We don't have much time!" Fuli pressed as they ran, careful not to go too fast and allow Kion to fall off Beshte's back.

"I'm trying Fuli! Kion's a lot heavier than he looks!" Beshte defended, huffing and puffing, finding it hard to keep up with the cheetah. The again, not even Anga could match her speed whilst flying; how could Beshte possibly keep up?

"Ugh." Fuli grunted in annoyance. This was no time to be making those comments.

The cheetah glanced over at the honey-badger.

"Bunga? You okay?" She asked as they ran.

Bunga looked up. "Oh, uh, yeah yeah. Just... tired."

"You sure?"

"Yeh!"

"Okay, then." Fuli muttered. She knew though, Bunga was worried. The honey-badger may be oblivious but he isn't entirely stupid; there was definitely something very wrong with Kion.

***

"Rafiki!" Fuli yelled as they reached Pride Rock, already heading into the lair.

Rushed footsteps were heard and the old mandrill entered, Makini at his heels.

"Come on guys, give him some room." Makini commanded, ushering them towards the entrance. They reluctantly left, remaining just outside the entrance.

Fuli paced back and forth, consumed within her mind.

What is going on in there?
Why are they taking so long?
What does Rafiki think it is?
Can it be cured?
Will Kion still be able to lead the guard?
Will he even survive to get the chance?

"Fuli!"

The cheetah looked up at her name to see several curious faces looking in her direction. She blinked and realised that she had tears running down her face. She quickly turned away and wiped them off her face with her paw.

"You okay?" She heard Ono ask.

Fuli sniffed and nodded, still looking away. She felt feathery arms wrap around her leg and looked down at Ono, giving him a small smile. Then the smell of the honey-badger joined them, wrapping his arms around Fuli's other leg. Finally Anga and Beshte joined them too.

Simba smiled curiously as he watched the group. The king made his descent from Pride Rock, his queen and their princess flanking him.

"Lion Guard." He called and they all broke apart quickly, standing up to greet the king. He smiled and shook his head, "No need for formalities, you just won a war!... What's going on? Where's Kion?" He asked, noticing his son's absence.

Fuli gulped and stepped forward. "Your majesties... something happened."

"What happened, Fuli? Where is Kion?" Nala demanded fearfully.

"He's in here." Rafiki said, coming out of the cavern. Fuli sighed with relief; she wouldn't have to explain what happened now that Kion was awake. "But I'm afraid there is nothing I can do for him."

"What?" Fuli asked in disbelief. "But he's going to be okay, right?

Right?"

Rafiki looked down. "I don't think he will make the night. I'm sorry."

"No..." Fuli whispered under her breath, her entire body shaking.

"Kion is awake now. You should all go and spend some time with him."

Everyone nodded.

While the royal family was inside, Fuli continued to pace through the grass. No one stopped her. No one cared to stop her. What good would it do?

After what felt like hours, Simba, Nala and Kiara finally left the den. The king had misty, teary eyes while Nala and Kiara had tears streaming down their faces, still sobbing as they sat down on the grass.

"Come on, Fuli. Let's go." Bunga said softly, gently pulling her with him into the cave.

As they entered, Fuli heard coughing and picked up speed, running ahead of the group.

"Kion!" She smiled slightly, coming to a stop by his side.

He smiled weakly, his head resting on his paws. "Hey guys. Hey Fuli."

"Oh, Kion." She cried, sitting beside him, sobbing. "I-I don't want you to go!"

He coughed again before placing his head on hers beside him and letting out a soft purr. "I don't want to go either, but it's the circle of life, Fuli. The circle of life. I love all of you guys, you're all my best friends and if," He coughed again. "If I could turn time back, I'd never change a thing."

"We love you." Bunga told him, now also crying. He came to Kion's other side and hugged him tightly, careful not to touch the scar that

was engrained into his features. The others joined and once again, it was one big hug.

Kion smiled softly, trying not to make any pain-filled noises. He knew they'd all move if he did, and he just wanted to stay like that forever. He'd never been afraid of dying... at least up until that moment.

"Guys, I'm-I'm scared." He whimpered softly.

"The great kings will guide you." Beshte said just as softly. "There isn't anything to be afraid of."

"Hey, Kion?" Bunga called.

"Yeah?"

"Coin a baobab ball for us, will ya?"

Kion chuckled and nodded. "Of course I will."

"Kion... there's something I need to tell you." Fuli said softly.

Kion looked in her direction, smiling as he looked into her sparkling eyes. "What is it, Fuli?" He asked with a small smile.

"I-I love you."

His heart fluttered, but then regret filled him. Tears slowly filled his eyes.

"I love you too. So much."

"You do?"

"I do." He leaned forward and touched his nose with hers. "I'm so sorry."

It took Fuli a moment to realise what was happening: she was finally admitting her feelings and he felt the same... but he was dying. He'd be gone by the morning.

"There's nothing to be sorry for." She said, smiling at him. "You

saved us all."

"And now it's your turn." Kion said. "Once I'm gone, you will be the leader of the guard. Will you-" He coughed several time and everyone broke away to give him air. He shivered and continued coughing until he rested his head back upon his paws. "Will you accept?"

Tears ran down Fuli's face as she nodded, "I will. I accept."

"Good." He smiled. And his eyes closed.

three

"Kion!" Fuli cried as he closed his eyes. "Kion!"

"Fuli, he's gone." Beshte's gentle voice rang in the background.

"No... he can't be gone. He isn't!"

"Fuli, let's go."

"Kion!"

***

"Hey, Fuli." A voice said, drawing the young cheetah out of her memories. She glanced up from the glistening water.

"Oh, hey, Kiara." She sighed, looking back down at her reflection. It may have only been a trick of the light, but Fuli could swear there was only half of her body painted on the water's surface.

"You okay?" The princess asked, sitting down beside her.

"What do you think." Fuli snapped before her features softened. "I'm sorry, Kiara, I just have to remember I'm not the only one who experienced loss today."

"True," Kiara began. "But we all had our own connection with him. Our own special way of loving him. We all lost someone different, even if it was just him."

Fuli nodded in understanding.

"He really loved you, you know." The cheetah looked up at her with glossy eyes. "You'd never believe the number of times he'd just talk about you endlessly. Kinda got annoying sometimes."

"Hey!" Fuli groaned and Kiara smiled.

"He'd talk about your skills, how you're such a great leader, your eyes, your smile, what you guys did that day, the times he wanted to tell you how he felt but chickened out before he could... he imagined a future with you, Fuli."

"He did?"

"He did." Kiara told her, giving her a soft smile. "I just thought you should know. The others told me what you guys said."

Fuli merely nodded, staring down into half of her reflection.

"We should go, the ceremony is about to begin." Kiara said, beginning to walk back to Pride Rock. The cheetah followed slowly, her head hanging low to the ground.

As they approached, the crowd that had formed around Pride Rock moved to give the two felines a pathway to the top. Kiara, now an only cub, sat beside her mother and father while Fuli sat beside Bunga and the guard, the setting sun shining brightly into their eyes.

The king stepped forward. "By now, all of you will know that my son, Kion, has completed his journey in the circle of life." He announced, his voice shaking. "He gave his life to protect us all from Scar, who thanks to Kion and the Lion Guard's efforts has been defeated. Kion was a noble leader and someone who would, without fail, help every animal he could with great or small tasks. Not only was he a loyal and just warrior, he was our energetic and lovable son. I am and always will be very proud to have raised such a lion."

Fuli shuddered as Zazu stepped forward to speak on behalf of the rest of the pride and the guard. It felt as though the ceremony was going on forever, a never ending goodbye. Fuli wanted this to be over so that she could go and be alone, but that would mean that Kion was gone for good. As long as this ceremony remained unfinished, Kion would still be here.

"Fuli will be taking over Kion's duties as leader of the Lion Guard." She heard Simba say. Fuli looked up to see many of the animals watching her skeptically.

"But she's a girl!"

"She isn't even a lion!"

"She doesn't have the roar!"

"What experience does she have?!"

Fuli shrunk back as the comments rolled out from the animals' mouths, her ears folding back.

"How do we know she will respect us?!"

"What's a lion guard without at least one lion?"

"She'll never be a good leader!"

"She's just a cub!"

"Why her?!"

"She's a cheetah!"

"Quiet!!" Kiara's soft voice roared. When the crowds continued to mock and criticize, the king let out a thundering roar, instantly silencing the animals.

Kiara nodded her head to him in thanks before stepping forward. "My brother trusted Fuli with the responsibility of being the next lion guard leader." Kiara said. "He trusted her to respect and protect you, which she has always done, and I feel that you should do the same for her. Kion had placed Fuli second in command some time ago, making her the perfect fit for this position. In his final moments, he asked her specifically to become the leader in his absence and she accepted in order to honor his wishes. We *expect* you all to do the same. With respect. Fuli is my friend and if I hear one more negative comment, well, let's just say your future queen won't be happy. This is not a time for complaints, this is the funeral of a great lion. Show some respect!"

The crowds made a murmuring sound but soon quieted down and bowed their heads.

"Thank you." Kiara said sarcastically, stepping back to her place. The princess sent a small smile in Fuli's direction who mouthed a quiet 'thank you,' in return.

"Now," Simba continued. "As I was saying, Fuli will be the new leader and will have the same rights and Kion had as leader and prince. She should be respected just as Kion was. She is apart of our pride now, apart of our family." The pride nodded in agreement and Fuli smiled shyly.

Simba and Nala led the crowd through the Pride Lands to a secluded, shady area. In the centre of the clearing was Kion, his body covered with different colored flowers and leaves. Everyone circled around him and bowed their heads in silence for the fallen prince.

As night fell and everyone left to go back to their homes, Fuli remained seated before the pile of flowers, her head lowered to the ground, just thinking.

"Fuli?" The cheetah looked up.

"Hey Bunga. What are you doing here?" She asked, looking back at Kion.

"I could ask you the same question." He stated, sitting down beside her.

She sighed. "Just thinking... Bunga, I miss him."

"So do I." Bunga agreed sadly. "I-I can't believe he's gone."

"I know. It's... It feels like a bad dream."

"You can say that again."

"Bunga... how am I supposed to lead? How could I possibly earn the respect Kion had and be as greater leader as he was?" She asked shakily.

"There's no way you could live up to what Kion did." He stated sharply. Fuli glanced at him, hurt. "No one could. But you can

create your own leadership style, be your own leader. That will get you love and respect. And even if no one in this kingdom loves and respects you, I will still support you. We all will." He smiled.

A tear ran down Fuli's cheek as she nodded. "Thanks, Bunga."

four

Fuli awoke the next morning in the Lion Guard lair, lying in Kion's usual spot off to the side of the cavern. She glanced around the dimly lit cavern and sighed. She could still smell Kion's scent in the lair, and supposed she would for months to come.

The cheetah stood up and quietly walked towards the entrance of the cave, careful not to disturb the others who were all still asleep and then headed in no particular direction.

She found herself at the border between the Outlands and the Pride Lands. She smiled softly, remembering one of their first adventures together when Kion ended up in the Outlands and they all had to make the journey to flat-ridge rock to find him again. They had crossed this border many times together, going back and forth between the volcano and home, or visiting Jasiri and her pack.

Jasiri!

"Oh no," Fuli muttered quietly. "We forgot to tell them about Kion..."

Fuli decided that they deserved to know. Jasiri had been one of Kion's best friends too, she deserved to know what happened after they left the Outlands.

She walked through the winding paths to the familiar caves. It was quiet, seemed like no one was home.

"Hello?" Fuli called out. "Huh, nobody's home then." She hummed, turning away to leave.

"Fuli? Is that you?" Fuli turned again to face the young hyena who was exiting a hidden den, still looking sleepy. "What are you doing here? Is everything alright?" Jasiri asked with concern.

Fuli's ears folded back and she looked away for a moment. "Jasiri...

it's about Kion..."

"What about Kion? How is he?"

"Jasiri... Kion's gone."

"Gone?" She asked, although deep down she knew the answer.

"He's dead."

"...What?" The hyena's eyes welled up with tears.

"I'm sorry, Jasiri... we tried everything... but, he couldn't take it... the poison reached his heart too quickly." Fuli said, fresh tears rolling down her face.

Jasiri's body quivered as she turned away.

"Jasiri-"

"I think it's best you leave, Fuli. But thank you, for telling me." She said, glancing back for a moment before walking away, leaving Fuli in the shadows.

Fuli sighed and turned away as well, heading back to the Pride Lands.

***

"Hey, Fuli." Beshte called as Fuli re-entered the guard's lair.

"Hey, guys."

"Where were you?" Ono asked, flying down from his nest.

"I-I went to the Outlands. I had to tell Jasiri about Kion."

"Oh..." Ono trailed awkwardly. "Well, we should get started on patrol, shouldn't we?"

"Yeah, probably." Anga agreed.

***

The patrol was quiet and awkward. The animals they passed cast skeptical glances towards Fuli and the rest of them.

"Panic and run! Panic and run!" Thurston, the zebra leader, was heard shouting.

"Let's go guys!" Fuli commanded, speeding off in the zebra's direction. As they reached a clearing, they spotted the zebra standing calmly in the center of it.

"Thurston?" Fuli questioned. "What's going on?"

"Oh, yay, you're all here!" He exclaimed excitedly.

"What. Is. Going. On." Fuli demanded, now very annoyed.

Thurston just smiled. "Some of us animals just wanted to say something to you."

The guards' brows crinkled in confusion as they exchanged confused looks.

"What animals? Its only us." Bunga stated the obvious.

The zebra shrugged and rustling could be heard. The lion guard looked around as various animals appeared, from some more zebras to the baboons, even the chameleon, Kinyonga, appeared at Fuli's paws. Even the elephants and some of the hippos left the cover of the trees.

"What... what are you all doing here?"

Ma Tembo, the elephant, stepped forward to Thurston's side.

"We recall what happened during Kion's ceremony yesterday, and we all thought you -all of you- should know that we respect and support each and every one of you. We know that Fuli will be a great leader and that you will all continue to strive to protect us, even without Kion, or any lion for that matter, within this guard. That's what makes your guard so special: you're all unique and have different opinions, and so as long as you all stay together as one, we will all be safe under your care."

Fuli sniffed and smiled her first genuine smile all week. "Thank you."

***

As the lion guard sat down beside one another at the watering hole, staring up at the stars, Fuli couldn't help but think of the story Kion had once told her about the great kings and queens of the past.

"Guys, do you think Kion's up there?" She asked softly, staring at one star in particular, the brightest one in the sky.

"He is. He has to be." Beshte said.

"Big B's right. There's no way Kion isn't up there!" Bunga agreed with a soft smile, but there was clearly pain written beneath it all.

Fuli smiled. "Yeah. Guys, I was thinking... since Kion made me the leader, that means I've become the fiercest. But now we don't have a fast member."

"True." Ono said. "What should we do?"

"Maybe we should find another member. I guess we have to." Fuli suggested, her words were met with silence. Ono, Anga and Beshte looked surprised, yet welcoming to the idea. Bunga, however, looked hurt.

"It's only been a day..." Bunga mumbled. "We can't just replace him."

Fuli sighed. "We're not Bunga, trust me, but we need a new member to become whole. To protect the Pride Lands."

"Fine, but I won't like it."

Everyone nodded in understanding. Kion had been Bunga's best friend, of course it'd be harder for him to accept than it was for the others, even more than Fuli.

"Maybe one day, Bunga. Maybe one day." Fuli half-smiled. "And you know, now that we're a guard with no lions... it doesn't really seem fitting to be called the Lion Guard anymore."

Beshte laughed. "Right."

"What do you think then?" Ono asked.

"What about... Pride Guard."

five

[image]

12 years later.

"Come on, Fuli!" Kiara giggled, dragging Fuli out to the centre of the dance floor.

"No, Kiara, you know I don't dance." Fuli complained, bur had a huge smile on her face anyway.

"Fuli, you're my best friend and its my wedding night! You can't not dance with me!" Kiara laughed, starting to dance around Fuli. The cheetah stood and watched her, trying to hide a laugh that crept up her throat.

"Exactly!" Fuli said. "It's *your* wedding night! You should be dancing with your husband!"

"Who? Kovu?" Kiara joked sarcastically. "It's a lot more fun to see you like this."

"Like what?" Fuli asked, feigning shock.

"Trying to hide your enjoyment!" Kiara smiled.

Fuli rolled her eyes and her smile broadened. "Whatever you say, Kiara."

"Come on, Fuli, seriously! Live a little! All you do is work, why don't you just take one night off?"

"Because it's my job, *princess*." Fuli retaliated, giving her friend a wink.

Kiara rolled her eyes. "One night." She begged.

Fuli sighed before nodding, already regretting her decision as Kiara squealed with excitement, dragging her off into the larger crowds.

It had been a year since the Pride Lands-Outlands war had finally ended, and the Pride Lands were prospering under the unision. The Pride Guard had been especially busy these days with the dry season approaching quickly. They also hadn't seen Jasiri or Janja since they had their own pups together only a few months ago.

As for the others, everything remained almost the same, but at the same time, everything was different to what it had been thirteen years ago.

***

"Hey Bunga!" Fuli called, running up to the honey-badger once she had managed to get away from Kiara and the other lionesses.

Bunga turned around and grinned. "Fuli, I saw you dancing! Great moves." He teased.

"Shut up, Smelly." Fuli said with an eye-roll.

"Hey! Believe it or not, I took a bath today!"

Fuli raised a brow, unbelieving.

"It's the truth!"

"Fine, fine!" She chuckled. "What are you doing here anyway? Weren't you staying with the guard for the evening patrol?"

"I did. And I was there." Bunga stated matter-of-factly. "But Hatari was driving me crazy! I just can't-"

"You're one to talk, Bunga." Fuli laughed and Bunga huffed, crossing his arms over his chest.

Bunga had never liked Hatari, the leopard, ever since he first joined the guard. It was understandable at first, but to this day, Fuli still assumes it was the same reason.

"Yeah, yeah, Fuli. At least I was there for a while, wasn't I? Besides, I thought you would need someone you know here."

"Excuse me? I know everyone here."

"True, but you're only *friends* with a few. And clearly they're busy, cause you're here with me." The honey-badger retaliated, causing Fuli to roll her eyes again.

"Psh, whatever you say, Bunga." Fuli chuckled.

Suddenly, a loud roar filled their ears. Everyone stopped dead and looked at the direction it came from, seeing a large, unknown lion standing in the shadows. His fur was a reddish-brown color and his mane was jet black. He had three scars running from his snout across his lip to his chin, his eyes dark red and a familiar stripe making its way down his back.

Fuli and Bunga took cautious steps forward, meeting Simba, Nala, Kovu and Kiara before the stranger.

"Who are you and why are you in our lands." Simba demanded, standing firmly. However, there was a certain look in Simba's eyes - a sense of familiarity perhaps, Fuli could not tell.

"I think you know who I am, *your majesty*." The lion stated. Everyone looked at the king expectantly. Simba exchanged a knowing glance with Nala, who nodded.

Simba turned back to the lion. "Uchafu."

The lion smirked as gasps from the older lions and lionesses filled the crowds.

"I'm back." Uchafu smiled evilly.

"I banished you!" Simba stated. "You don't belong here. Leave. Now!"

Uchafu scoffed. "As if that's ever stopped anyone from entering your lands. Sure didn't stop dear old mumsy."

"Daddy? Who is this? What's he talking about?" Kiara asked with concern.

Simba swallowed deeply and glanced at Kovu and Vitani. "...This lion is the son of Scar and Zira. I banished him along with the rest of Zira's followers years ago." He stated simply.

"What?" Kovu and Vitani said in sync.

"He-he's our brother?" Vitani asked, looking between Simba and the lion.

"Not by choice." Uchafu snapped with a growl. "You are both traitors and will be treated as such. I knew... ever since you two were runts I knew nothing good would come from keeping you around. Of course, dear mother and father thought it was a fabulous idea to keep you both alive. But I intend to rectify that error for them."

Kovu let out a deep growl, digging his claws into the ground.

"Why are you here?" Simba asked again, trying to divert the conversation for now. This was not the time nor place.

Uchafu grinned, stepping closer towards them. He circled Kiara, glancing at Kovu who looked murderous. "How could I not pay my respects to my own brother at his wedding? That doesn't seem very *brotherly*, does it, cousin?" He asked Simba.

"Get away from her." Fuli demanded, baring her teeth.

"Pff!" Uchafu laughed, instead turning his attention to the cheetah. "And why should I listen to you? Who the hell are you anyway?"

Fuli held her head up proudly. "Fuli, leader of the Pride Guard."

Uchafu let out a hysterical laugh, tears of amusement running down his face. "A cheetah... leading what used to be the Lion Guard!?" He laughed. "That's real cute."

Fuli growled, getting into an offensive stance. "Do not call me *cute*."

Before he could answer her, Simba spoke. "Why have you really returned, Uchafu."

The scarred lion looked back at the king, a smirk finding its way onto his lips. "That is for me to know and for you all to find out. Enjoy this *beautiful* celebration, for it may be your last."

With that, Uchafu ran off into the darkness, leaving a helpless pride behind.

There was a moment of silent shock before quiet muttering started.

"Fuli." Simba called.

"Yes, your majesty?"

"Take some lionesses and go after him. Make sure he's beyond the border. Then get the guard to set up an extra patrol; I want this entire kingdom under watch at all times."

"Yes, Simba." Fuli nodded. "Vitani, gather a group of lionesses and start following him. I will join you shortly." Vitani nodded and turned to gather some lionesses whilst Fuli turned back to Bunga. "Bunga, I need you too-"

"Find the rest of the guard, tell them of the situation and then start another patrol from Pride Rock?"

Fuli smirked and nodded, "You got it."

Bunga nodded and turned, running off. Fuli watched as he left, stuck in thought. Bunga had changed a lot during the past 12 years. They all had, but Bunga most of all; he wasn't the carefree honey-badger that made smart comments during any situation or managed to gas out any unwanted creature. He was a lot more serious than he used to be and very closed off to those he doesn't know, especially Hatari. At one stage, Bunga almost quit the guard because of him, but Fuli managed to convince him to stay, if not for them, then for his lost best friend.

"Fuli, we're ready to go!" Vitani called, snapping Fuli out of her daydream. The cheetah turned and led the group of lionesses away from Pride Rock, trying to track down their newest threat.

***

Having had no luck, Fuli decided to send the lionesses home and join her guard. Besides, Hatari and Bunga would be getting on each other's nerves by now once again and she'd need to stop them.

As she ran, she decided to stop for a drink at the watering hole. Sitting down for a moment to catch her breath, she looked up at the sky. Whenever Fuli felt lonely, she'd look up at the stars and think of *him*. The brightest one always seemed to shine the brightest to her.

"Hey there, Kion." She said softly, her breath catching on his name. "Long time no speak."

Years ago, not long after he died, Fuli had started speaking to the stars as if she were speaking to him. It always made her feel closer to him, like they weren't so far away from one another. The habit had eventually faded; she hadn't done this in years.

"You know, Kion, you should be proud of your sister. After everything the Outlanders put your family through, she still went on to marry one." Fuli chuckled softly. "I just hope for everyone's sake that this new lion won't become such a big threat. I'd better be going to make sure this fantasy comes true. Just this one time."

~~~

Hello people! How are you all doing?
I hope you are all enjoying this story so far! Here's a little teaser for the future...

It's been 12 years since Kion died and the new guard was formed, but everything has changed... what will happen when a prophecy is revealed and a certain cheetah sets out on a journey to make sure it comes to pass...

~ V
~~~

six

"Guys, wait up!" Fuli yelled, racing towards her friends.'
The Pride Guard turned and smiled as their leader stopped beside them.

"Fuli!" The large hippo exclaimed, "How did the search with the lionesses go?"

"Not well," She sighed. "We found nothing-no scent, no tracks, no trace of this lion ever existing! But he can't just disappear!"

"What if this strange lion really doesn't exist and someone just had a bad dream or something?" Hatari questioned with a shrug.

Everyone glared at him.

"Don't be stupid, Hatari. We know what we saw." Bunga snapped and Hatari rolled his eyes, continuing to walk down the path.

"So," Fuli continued. "What about you guys? Found anything?"

"Unfortunatly not," Ono replied. "We could really use Anga in the sky right about now- my eye sight is not what it used to be."

"Yeah, well, we can't help that she's on egg leave." Beshte said and everyone nodded in agreement.

"Wouldn't it be cool if Kion was here and then when we find this lion he just blasts-"

"Hatari!" The boys snapped angrily while Fuli stopped dead in her tracks.

"What?!" Hatari complained. "I was just saying that if Ki-"

"Shut up!" Fuli snapped. "Just... don't say his name!"

She began walking on, her eyes locked onto the distance. She heard

Hatari let out a puff of air, following her in silence.

After a while, Hatari's annoying voice filled the air again. "Why don't you guys ever say his name? It's as if you hate him or something."

Fuli clenched her eyes shut, having stopped mid-step once again. Bunga, not focusing either after his latest comment walked straight into her leg, falling down to the floor. Beshte and Ono exchanged looks, knowing that soon both Fuli and Bunga would snap. The two were angry with Hatari as well, but they could better control their emotions.

"Leave." Fuli said quietly, looking away from the leopard.

"Excuse me?" Hatari asked.

"I said LEAVE!" Fuli shouted.

Hatari looked to Bunga, Beshte and Ono for help, but found agreement instead.

"Fuli-" He began, stepping closer, only to be cut off by the honey badger.

"She told you to leave, Hatari." He said sternly. The leopard growled before turning to go home.

After a few paces he turned again, "What did he ever do to you all?"

Fuli whirled around and stormed up to him, leaving no time for Hatari to take even one step back.

"You listen to me!" She roared. "I did not hate Kion, none of us ever did! I loved him! And then he died!"

"If you loved him so much, why do you refuse to acknowledge him?!"

"Hatari!" Bunga yelled angrily. "Leave. Now. And don't bother joining us for patrol tomorrow, or ever again."

"Excuse me?!" The leopard snapped. "Who gave you the authority to order me around?!"

Everyone looked to Fuli who said nothing, merely nodding in response.

Hatari had a look of shock on his face which soon turned to anger and envy. "Even in death Kion gets chosen over me," He mumbled under his breath. "You know what?! Fine! I'll leave! But when you're all in desperate need of me to save your butts, don't count on me to be there!"

And with that, he ran off.

"Fuli?" Bunga asked softly. "You okay?"

The cheetah just ignored him, walking away.

***

Fuli ran ahead of the rest of the guard, trying desperatly to make the tears go away before anyone else saw.

She paced around under a tree, thinking of what Hatari said.

It's as if you hate him

You refuse to acknowledge him

Does she really do that?

"Stupid leopard." She mumbled angrily. "He's known us all for twelve years, yet now he decides to talk about him?! Didn't he realise that we don't talk about him because it's too sad! We feel too guilty!?"

"Why do you feel guilty, young cheetah?"

Fuli looked up, startled.

"Who said that?" She asked, looking through the tree's branches.

An old animal slowly made her way out of the cover of the leaves

into the moonlight. Very slowly.

"My name is Mwepesi." The creature smiled.

"You're a... sloth?" Fuli questioned curiously.

Mwepesi slowly nodded. "Indeed I am. I am one of the last of my kind in this region."

Fuli nodded.

"Come now, Fuli the cheetah, Pride Guard leader, why do you feel so guilty?" The sloth pressed.

"How do you know me?"

The sloth chuckled, "Everyone knows you, Fuli. You are the great cheetah protector of the Pride Lands. Even those outside our borders know who you are."

Fuli blushed a bit. "I didn't know that."

"And now you do."

"Yeah, so, you must remember the prince, the previous leader of the guard."

Mwespesi nodded, "Yes."

"Well, during the battle where he... died... if it wasn't for us -wasn't for me- maybe he would still be alive, here with me."

"You loved him?"

Fuli looked up at her slowly and nodded. The sloth laughed.

"What's so funny?" Fuli asked with annoyance.

As her laughter died down, the sloth spoke. "Not long after Prince Kion's death, I came across a prophecy stating that one day, the good prince shall return by the passage of Hekalu La Uzima, the Temple of Life."

"What?" Was all Fuli could say.

The sloth smiled, "When I was young, there was a tale of a forbidden monument at the far south of the snowy mountains. Inside was a round step that, with the power of two who love them most, could bring back a fallen leader. But beware, for if this story is true and the demons hear of it, the worst nemesies could be brought back to the living world."

"Is-is it true?" Fuli asked shakily, unsure whether she should begin to have hope or not.

Mwepesi shrugged. "That is for you to find out, young Fuli."

Are the stories true? Is there really a place that can bring back the dead?

Is it worth hoping?

Let's say it is true... would Kion be the same lion he was when he... died?

And who would be there? A lot of people loved him...

Would anyone even believe this ?

"Fuli?"

Fuli looked up at a concerned guard.

"Guys..." She took a breath. "Do you believe in myth?"

seven

"Believe in myth?" Beshte questioned. "I guess so... why?"

"I.... I was talking to Mwepesi ... she said somethings that have given me hope."

"Who?" Bunga questioned. "And hope for what?" Bunga asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Hope for Kion's return."

"What? That's impossible." Ono stated. "Whatever it is, it's against the laws of nature and physically unreal. Resurrection has never been done before."

"It has. With Scar." Fuli said.

"That's different. He wasn't in his full body, didn't have flesh... didn't have a soul."

"He never had a soul, Ono." Bunga said. "But I have to agree with you; it is different and there is no real way of resurrecting someone from the dead."

Fuli huffed. "We'll never know until we try! Isn't it worth going on a short voyage to the mountains-"

"The snowy mountains?!" Ono interrupted. "That journey takes days! Besides, we have a new threat here in the Pride Lands anyway. We can't just go off adventuring on a pointless journey."

"We don't know if it's pointless or not!" Fuli defended.

"Fuli." Beshte said calmly. "Maybe once this is all over, we can spare a week and then go, but until then isn't it safer to stay here? The Pride Lands need us."

Fuli screamed innerly. "Fine! Why don't you just ask Mwepesi?!"

"Who is that?!" Bunga repeated.

"The sloth who told me about these things! She's right up-"

Fuli turned and looked up at the tree, her face falling.

"Fuli... there's no one there." Beshte stated. Fuli let her head fall as she looked down.

"Fuli! Where are you going?!" Bunga called as she began to run off.

"Carry on with the patrol!" She ordered from the distance. "I need to talk to someone!"

Ono sighed, "Let's just hope she doesn't do anything too reckless."

***

"Kiara?!" Fuli whisper-yelled, entering the cavern. "Kiara!"

The princess poked her head up from the back of the cave, looking sleepy and dazed.

"Fuli?" She asked, standing up. "What are you doing here?"

"I have to talk to you. Now."

"Okay..."

They walked outside and sat on the ledge of Pride Rock, looking out over the dark lands.

"What is it? Have you found anything on Uchafu?"

"No..." Fuli started. "But, I did find something else though. Or technically, I found someone."

"Who? What are you talking about?"

"Okay, so, I was walking ahead of the guard and then this sloth appeared and she told me of some 'prophecy' she heard of."

"Which says...?"

"Which says that one day Kion will come back to life."

Kiara took a step back, her face silky white as if she'd just seen a ghost.

"H-how?"

"She called it Hekalu La Uzima, the Temple of Life. Somehow, the love from two who do love him can bring him back."

"Are-are you sure?"

"No, she said we had to find out. The others think its ridiculous but-"

"It's the only possibility we have." Kiara finished and Fuli nodded.

The princess swallowed deeply, looking back at the cavern where her husband, friends and parents slept soundly.

She glanced back at Fuli. "What about the pride, the guard? What about Uchafu's threats?"

"Kiara, if we can bring Kion back, then we can defeat Uchafu." Fuli explained. "Maybe this is our only chance at defeating him?"

Kiara looked back at the cavern again before deciding. "When do we leave?"

"Right now."

"Then let's go."

***

Hatari listened closely to Fuli and Kiara's conversation, sitting in a tall tree a few feet away.

"*One day Kion will come back to life*." Fuli said and his eyes almost popped out of his head. It's impossible...

"*Hekalu La Uzima, the Temple of Life."*

"The Temple of Life..." Hatari repeated under his breath.

"If we can bring Kion back, then we can defeat Uchafu."

An idea popped into the leopard's head and he smiled ambitiously, waiting for Kiara and Fuli to leave before making his own way down the tree.

He glanced left and right, then disappeared into the night.

eight

"Hello?!" Hatari called out, walking into an empty clearing. "Is anyone here?"

A low growl escaped the shadows, making the leopard shiver in fright, but he stood tall nonetheless.

"Who are you and why have you come looking for me?" The owner of the growl asked and Hatari smirked.

"I have valuable information for you, Uchafu." He said. "In exchange for said information, you will share your power with me once you take over the Pride Lands."

The lion stepped forward into the moonlight, he teeth bared and claws extended. "If your information is as valuable as you think, perhaps you will get away from here with your limbs still intact. If not.. well, you get the gist of it."

"You can kill me," Hatari said simply, "But once Kiara and Fuli return, you might regret that."

"The daft princess and the cheetah? Why do I care where they are running off to?" He snapped. "I just consider them cowards."

Hatari chuckled and shook his head, "They are setting out to a special place... a place with magical properties- enough to revive those who have departed from our world."

Uchafu's eyes snapped up like a flicker of hot flame erpting into a dangerous fire, "What?"

Hatari continued to smirk, "You heard correctly, friend. The two intend to revive Prince Kion in hopes of defeating you with his roar... the roar of the elders. That which helped defeat your father years ago."

Uchafu's face grew dark, "Then we have to stop them. Where is this

place?"

"I will take you there, if you agree to my terms."

The lion growled but nodded, "Deal."

Hatari smiled and nodded, standing up. "What are we waiting for?"

***

Fuli and Kiara had been walking for hours. The sun had already risen and was almost right above their heads, beating hard down onto their fur.

"How much further do you think we have to go?" Kiara asked, out of breath. "It sure is hot out here."

"Um... I'm not exactly sure." Fuli looked back, flashing Kiara an innocent smile. "I guess as long as we keep the Snowy Mountains in view, we'll get there eventually."

Kiara chuckled, "True, but Fuli we don't have much time. For all we know, Uchafu could already be attacking-"

"Kiara!" Fuli snapped lightly. "They'll be fine. Besides, if we get this right, there will be no need for any war at all."

"I hope you're right," Kiara muttered under her breath.

They carried on walking towards the mountains that were barely visible over the sand dunes, but Kiara suddenly stopped short.

"Kiara? You okay?" Fuli asked, looking at the lioness over her shoulder curiously. She had her head lifted high into the air, taking in deep puffs of the atmosphere.

She smiled, "You smell that?"

Fuli's brows knitted together and she lifted her head as well, sniffing. "Water?"

"Yeah, come on!" Kiara sped in the opposite direction of the

mountains, leaving no room for argument. Fuli huffed, rolled her eyes and was forced to follow. They eventually reached a large river on the edge of the desert. On the other side was a grassy plane and then a pass... leading around a dark forest and straight to the mountains.

"Kiara you're brilliant!" Fuli exclaimed happily, spotting the pass in the distance. "This will cut our journey short by days!"

Kiara smiled and winked at her, "Yeah, that's what I'm good at. Now come on, we need a break."

"Kiara-"

"Ah!" Kiara butt in before Fuli could speak. "If we're going to get my brother back and save the Pride Lands, we're going to need all of the strength we can get. We can't die of thirst or exhaustion all the way out here."

Fuli sighed but nodded, "You're right."

Kiara's smile only widened with amusement, "Of course I am." She then started to make her way down the steep, sandy bank beneath them towards the water's edge.

"Be careful, Kiara!" Fuli warned as Kiara almost slipped on the hot sand.

"I'm fine, Fuli. I'm not totally helpess."

Fuli shook her head, "If you were, I wouldn't have brought you along."

Kiara chuckled snarkily as she reached the edge and began to lap the water up with her tongue. "Who else would have believed your story enough to come wi-"

SPLASH!

"Kiara!" Fuli yelled as the ground beneath the lioness gave way, causing her to tip into the icy water.

The rapids immediatly climbed over her, dragging her down beneath the surface. Fuli watched in shock as Kiara disappeared for a few moments before reappearing further down the river.

"Fuli!"

Fuli blinked and looked around for something to help save Kiara, but the land was barren. "I'm coming!" Fuli called back, taking to running after her instead. "Just hold on!"

Fuli ran along the bank, easily keeping pace with Kiara.

"Fuli!!"

"I'm trying Kiara!" The cheetah snapped.

She looked around and spotted a long, thick vine curled up... on the other side of the river. "Damnit!" She whisper-yelled under her breath, glancing at Kiara struggling in the water.

Then the sound of light, running footsteps filled Fuli's ears. She looked back at the other side of the bank as a cloud of dust ran across the ground, almost running in sync with the floating lion and sprinting cheetah. She watched as the dust stopped moving where she'd first spotted the vines, the cloud clearing just enough for her to see a...

Another cheetah?

Fuli stopped and stared, mouth agape. She hadn't seen another cheetah since... well, since her parents abandoned her as a cub. She watched as he lifted the dark green vine in his mouth and dragged it over to the river, finally locking eyes with Fuli.

"Here!" He yelled with a thick, foreign accent, throwing one side of the vine towards Fuli. It took her a moment to realise what was happening, but soon she, too, picked up the vine. The male cheetah then started running towards Kiara, still floating down stream, with the vine in his mouth. Fuli followed his lead from her side of the bank.

"Kiara grab on!" Fuli instructed as they finally reached her. Kiara

immediatly reached upwards and grabbed the vine hanging over her head, gasping for air. "Now move!" The princess did as told and moved towards the male's side absent-mindedly, having been closer to his side. When she reached the bank, the cheetah let go and helped her up onto the sandy grass. Kiara huffed and puffed for air, dripping wet.

The she looked up and smiled a small smile, "Thank you."

He smirked, "No problem."

***

Hiya readers!

You know... updating this story isn't going as quick as I thought it would! I'm currently writing exams, but as soon as they finish I'll set to work on writing more! I finished this chapter a couple of weeks ago, but I wasn't sure it was worthy of being published. Today, I decided that you've all waited with baited breath for a long ten days, so here we are! I hope you all enjoyed!

-V 💕

tagged

[image]

Hello Readers!
So... this clearly isn't a chapter. Again, I apologize for lack of updates, hopefully I'll he publishing chapter 9 soon!

Anyway, here's the reason for this update: I GOT TAGGED

1. Racer_101_452
2. Okie doke
3.
~ I'm a girl to the ones who haven't figured it out yet
~ I live in South Africa **Z A** (whoop whoop)
~ My favorite shows include Avatar The Last Airbender, Once Upon A Time, Merlin, Prison Break and many others of the same region.
~ My first language is English but ironically my best subject is Afrikaans.
~ I have one stubborn little brother (who is also taller than me)
~ Single as a Pringle forever
~ I'm really shy and don't like other people knowing things about me, including my strange hobbies like writing. It's not that I'm ashamed of it -I'm seriously proud of myself- but I just don't like other people knowing.
~ I was diagnosed with a minor form of anxiety this year.
~ I play volleyball A Team!!
~ I will spend 11 hours on my phone a day just because of Wattpad. Like seriously, I did that last weekend even.

4. I don't have that many people to tag...
Ahadiuru468
M2002H
PrincessGG101
CoolKeen
koulakoukoula
(Some of you I haven't ever even spoken to before, solly)

5. **(DON'T READ IF YOU DON'T WANT A SPOILER!)**

A spoiler would be that the cheetah who saved Kiara and Fuli is Azaad.

6. I don't know jokes so...
"The punchline is: Leaf me alone, I'm bushed."

awkward silence

7. Done ✓

nine

Hello Readers!
Here is the next chapter, I am so sorry it took so long!
However, I did not write a single word in this entire chapter!
All credits go to CheetahpawTheFastest who took time out of their own day to write this chapter for me and all of you.
Please enjoy, I know I did!

Fuli stared at the cheetah, amazed and grateful. Kiara looked up at him, breathing a sigh of relief. "You saved me," she breathed. "Thank you."

"No problem" The cheetah smirked. His ears then folded down. "It was Azaad's pleasure. Now Azaad must get going..."

Kiara seemed to notice he was sad, because she asked; "What's wrong?"

"Nothing... It's just that no one comes around often. Azaad is usually alone all the time. Whilst cheetahs do prefer their alone time, Azaad just wishes that he could have some company every now and then."

Kiara's ears folded down in dismay. She then perked up. "Oh, I know! You can travel with us! Think of it as a repayment for saving my life."

Fuli opened her mouth to protest, but she couldn't find words. This stranger doesn't need to come with us! I mean sure, he saved Kiara, but-

Her thoughts were interrupted when Azaad replied excitedly. "Ooh yes! Azaad would love that!"

Fuli finally found words to protest. "What?! No! But-!?"

Kiara looked at Fuli. She motioned for her to come a little bit away from Azaad. Kiara spoke. "He saved my life. We should let him

come with us. He feels so lonely all by himself with no friends."

Fuli's ears flattened as she gazed in Azaad's direction. Pity swept over her, but not strong enough to make her want Azaad to travel with them. "I know he's lonely," Fuli began, trying not to directly provoke Kiara. "But he might be a distraction. We're trying to find Kion and get home as soon as we can before Uchafu attacks."

Kiara sighed. "But shouldn't we give him a chance...?"

Fuli looked at Kiara. "But we don't even know him."

Kiara held Fuli's gaze. "Let's just give him a chance." She dropped her gaze to her paws and shakily added; "It's what Kion would have done."

Fuli winced at the memory of her lost friend. Memories rushed through her mind, some fun, some painful. She knew that Kiara did make a good point. She remembered when Kion gave Janja and the hyenas a second chance. He was so wise... More memories rushed through her. She blinked, trying to prevent any tears from threatening to fall.

Kiara must have realized her mistake, because her ears folded back and she shuffled her paws. "I-I'm sorry Fuli. I didn't mean to guilt trip you or-"

"N-no, you're right," Fuli admitted, "Azaad can come with us."

Kiara's lips spread into a smile. "Thank you Fuli."

Fuli forced a smile. "Yeah.."

Kiara trotted back to Azaad, a spring in her step. Oh, how Kiara loves to make new friends... Fuli thought slightly in amusement.

"Okay, Azaad. You're coming with us," Kiara told him excitedly. "Let's go!"

***

Little did they know, they were being watched...

Uchafu slinked in the shadows, undetected. His lips twisted into a crooked smile as he watched the felines. Hatari sat next to him, eyes glowing with anticipation.

"So, what do we do next, Master?" Uchafu asked Hatari, rolling his eyes.

"We-" Uchafu quickly cut off Hatari's reply. "I wasn't talking to you, fool! Do you really think that I would seek advice from YOU?!"

As Uchafu shouted at him, something caught Hatari's eye in the corner of his vision. He gasped. It was Fuli, Kiara, and Azaad, each of them dangerously close to Hatari and Uchafu. The leopard glanced to the right and looked nervously back at Uchafu. He hissed. "Uchafu!"

"You DARE raise your voice at me?!" Uchafu growled threateningly.

"No! No!" Hatari quickly shoved his paw over Uchafu's mouth. "They're right there!" He pointed with his paw to Fuli, Kiara, and Azaad walking past, dangerously close to Uchafu and Hatari."They'll hear us," Hatari whispered.

"Then stop talking and he quiet, hyena-brain," Uchafu hissed. Hatari sighed in frustration. When will that hyena-hearted fool ever listen?

"As I was going to say earlier, before YOU almost caught their attention," Uchafu began. Hatari managed a subtle eye roll as the evil lion continued, "We will need to gather allies. Many allies. The question is.. how do we get them?..."

"Oh, I think I-"

"Shut it, hyena-brain," Uchafu snapped, "I already know what to do. We'll prowl around the area, spread lies about the Pride Lands and how they've betrayed us. How Kion and his family were evil lions. How they must be defeated."

"But I think I have an easier-"

"Soon, we'll have an army with hundreds of animals. If not hundreds, thousands! We will make the Pride Lands pay!"

A twinge of guilt made it's way into Hatari's heart. These were the animals he's known for years He intended on killing. He quickly pushed the guilt down. No one had ever cared about him. Not a single soul. But this would be better. He and Uchafu would rise to power, and he'd get everything he was denied for his entire life.

***

"Did you guys find them?" Kovu asked worriedly.

"We found paw prints heading outside the Pride Lands," Ono informed him. "They looked like the prints of a cheetah and a lioness."

Kovu breathed a sigh of only some relief. They still hadn't exactly found Kiara and Fuli, just found things that could point them in their direction. However, he managed a cheer. "We found them."

"Not yet," Bunga sighed negatively. He didn't want to get his hopes up. Fuli had been his friend for his entire life. She, Beshte, and Ono were a few of his only friends. And Kiara was Kion's sister. She was one of the only things that Bunga had left of him.

"Okay, so we could follow the paw prints to them, but that might be a bad idea," Ono told them.

"Why?" Bunga asked.

"Because if they left, they must have a reason, may it be good or bad," Ono explained. He looked at the group. "There has to be some clue of why they've gone." Ono closed his eyes. He appeared to already be deep in thought. "Nowasa.. Nowasa.. Nowasa..." His eyes snapped open.

"The myth!"

"Say wha?" Bunga asked. "Myth?"

"Guys, do you remember when Fuli tried to tell us a myth of Kion being resurrected from the dead?"

Bunga nodded along with the rest of the Guard, trying his best not

to flinch at the mention of his friend who had completed his journey through the circle of life.

"Well, didn't you notice that when she ran off, she ran in the direction of Pride Rock?" Ono pressed. "And that she and Kiara disappeared at the same time?..."

"And that's supposed to mean... what?" Bunga asked confused.

"That Kiara went off with Fuli to bring Kion back," Ono told them.

Kovu's jaw dropped. "How could she leave us like this?" He asked, his voice low. "Why would she, our future queen, leave us when we need her? When I need her?"

Bunga felt sympathy sweep over him. He touched his paw to Kovu's shoulder in a comforting gesture. "Kiara loved Kion very much. They were the best of siblings. They had their sibling rivalries but in the end, they were always brother and sister."

Kovu sighed. "But she should've stayed here. She had a duty to the Pride Lands. The legend she heard isn't real. Myths are just that, myths."

"But who says it is?" Beshte asked. "Remember, Scar was resurrected from the dead. And if that's possible, why can't bringing Kion back be?"

"I guess you make a point.. but Scar was different. He was just a spirit," Bunga argued.

"But if that's possible then this could also be possible too," Beshte argued.

"I guess...?"

Kovu took a deep breath. "I love Kiara. If this is important to her, I will follow." He looked at the Guard, as if silently urging them to come.

Bunga rose to his paws, a new fire of determination rising in his heart. "Fuli is my best friend. She loved Kion with all of her heart.

Kion was my best friend too and if there's any possibility of him being brought back, I will try."

This left Beshte and Ono yet to make a decision. Looking sure of themselves, they then stood up and faced Kovu and Bunga.

"Count me in," Beshte said with the same determination in his voice that Bunga had.

"I'm coming too," Ono said. His gaze held none other than determination.

"Okay," Kovu said, obviously trying not to let his voice shake. "Ono, where were the tracks?"

"The edge of the western border," Ono told him.

"Okay." Bunga knew that Kovu was trying not to let his voice shake. He had to remain strong in front of the leaderless group. "Let's go."

***

Fuli laid in the den that she, Kiara, and Azaad had picked out to shelter in for the night. Kiara and Azaad were fast asleep. Fuli was the only one awake.

She took a peek out of the den and looked at the stars. "Kion, are you up there somewhere?" She asked softly.

She felt herself growing tired. She could've sworn that she felt fur press against her own fur, but she knew she was imagining it. She didn't look to the side, didn't try to confirm that Kion wasn't really there. Instead, she leaned into the embrace. It comforted her, made her think of the old times where it was just him, her, and their friends without a single care in the world.

She let a purr escape her throat and smiled. "I love you, Kion."

And she could have sworn she heard a reply. "I love you too..."

***

Fuli happily frolicked through the Pride Lands. She saw a butterfly that fluttered over her. She batted at it. It quickly flew away. Fuli playfully chased it.

She wasn't looking where she was going, and stumbled into a shallow stream. She gasped. The water was freezing cold! She quickly dashed out, half soaked.

Annoyed, she shook her fur, sending water flying everywhere. She scowled at the water. "Stupid water!"

She then noticed her reflection. A detail that stood out was the Mark of the Guard on her shoulder. She looked at it with pride. She was the Fastest in the Pride Lands, a part of the team who defended the circle of life.

"Are you capable of this?" A voice asked.

"Of course I am!"

"Can you do it?" The voice asked her. "Can you really do it?"

Suddenly, the scene changed. A blood red sky looked over the Pride Lands. Hyenas were everywhere and she was standing at the top of Pride Rock.

"If you can't, if one member of the team can't pull through, this will happen." A voice told her. "This happened because you weren't good enough."

A screech of agony split the air. It came from the base of Pride Rock. Fuli rushed down.

When she saw who was crying out in pain, she was horrified. It wasn't just one animal, it was all of the Pride Lands. They seemed to be drowning in their own blood. But there was four voices who stood out the most. Kion, Bunga, Beshte, and Ono.

Fuli rushed over to them, but Bunga started screaming. "STAY AWAY FROM US! THIS WAS BECAUSE OF YOU! GET AWAY!"

"I hate to admit it," Beshte sniffled, "But he's right.."

"Yes," Ono agreed sharply. "One hundred percent right."

Fuli then finally laid eyes on Kion. He was laying in his own blood, trying his best not to cry in pain.

"Oh... no, no, no, no! Kion...!"

Kion looked up at her with dull, clouded eyes. One of them was bleeding out onto the ground. There was a deep cut on the bleeding eye. Two marks over the eye, one below it.

"Fuli-" He broke off, coughing. "It's okay... It's not your fault." She looked around her. The glares of her friends told her otherwise. Her own mind told her otherwise.

"I'm so sorry, Kion." She buried her muzzle in his fur, sobbing.

"Don't be sorry, Fuli." Fuli pulled back and gazed at him. He looked as if he had a million more things to say, but he didn't.

He looked her in the eyes once more. "Once I'm gone, you will be leader of the Guard. Will you-" He broke off once more and coughed several times. "Will you accept?"

Fuli felt her whole world crash down on her. Kion was dying. Her lifelong friend was dying. And it was all her fault.

She took in a shaky breath. "I'm sorry, Kion. But... I can't."

"I agree," Bunga snarled. "She's not fit to lead."

"Affirmative. All she's ever done is be a burden. And now she's done THIS!" Ono glared at Fuli, his keen gaze seeming to pierce through her soul itself.

"I never thought this would happen..." Tears ran down Beshte's face as he struggled to speak. "But it did."

Fuli couldn't bare the harsh gazes and words of her friends. She turned back to look at Kion and gasped in horror. His eyes were lifeless and his body was splayed out on the ground.

"NO!" She screamed.

"You caused this!"

"It's your fault!"

"If it weren't for you everything would be okay!"

"You should never have been on the Guard!"

"YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE EVER BEEN BORN!"

***

Fuli's eyes snapped open. She quickly looked around, blood roaring in her ears. Her heartbeat started to slow as she realized it was only a dream. She was in the den with Kiara and Azaad on the journey to find the Temple of Life.

New determination lit inside her like a wildfire.

We will bring Kion back, if it's the last thing we do.

Thanks again, @CheetahpawTheFastest ! You rock, friend! Give them some love in the comments!

ten

The trek was growing harder as the days went on. The trio made of a young princess and two cheetahs had traveled away from the Pride Lands, across a portion of the desert, over a desolate grassy savannah and were now finding themselves at the edge of the snow lands. They were close, but it had taken too much time.

Fuli worried over the Pride Lands; it was her duty to protect the land in Kion's place and yet here she was on a likely pointless journey while a savage could be slaughtering the animals she swore to protect, torturing her friends and capturing the throne for himself. And none of them would know until they returned.

Fuli stared up to the top of the mountain; she could not even see the top as it was covered in fog and icy mist. It was freezing here and coat of a saharan animal did little to comfort her in the cold.

"We should rest for tonight," Azaad said as he too looked up the mountain. "We need our strength to make it up there."

"But we're so close!" Fuli protested vainly. "It can't be that far up!"

Azaad raised a cocky eyebrow, "And yet we cannot see the top."

Fuli rolled her eyes, sick of his sarcasm and ignorace and just -- him! Who did this cheetah think he was anyhow? Joining their excursion by guilt-tripping her and Kiara, making himself the "Big Man" as Fuli described it. She was just sick of him!

Fuli set her jaw in determination. "We are going, *now*."

"Fuli," Kiara piped up softly. "I know you want to get there -I do too!- but Azaad is right. We haven't stopped in hours and without rest we won't be able to get to the top in one piece."

Fuli grumbled incoherent words under her breath before finally nodding. However, she sent a glare in the other cheetah's direction;

he had Kiara wrapped around his claw. "We leave at dawn." She said with finality. The other two agreed.

"Great!" Kiara then said. "I'll try to find us some food. You two can find a cave close by and wait."

Fuli tried to protest but the princess -with a smug grin- had already disappeared around the mountain side. Fuli growled under her breath.

"Well then Fuli," Azaad said in his annoying accent, coming to her side with a bounce in his step. "It looks like it is just you and me for a while!"

Fuli rolled her eyes, her ears dropping slightly, "Great."

***

They managed to find a deserted cave in the side of the mountain, sheltered from the wind by the rocky covering which acted like a door of sorts. Fuli lay close to the wall, curled in on herself in search of warmth.

Azaad sat a few feet away, watching the lady cheetah out of the corner of his eye. She was very beautiful indeed; although, Azaad found, she denied her strengths too often. Fuli was closed off to anyone she didn't already know which made Azaad's attempts at conversation and friendship more and more difficult.

The cheetah was not entirely sure why he asked to travel with them in the first place. Indeed, he was lonely, but there was more to it than that. When he first laid eyes upon the cheetah who had caught his heart despite everything, he had felt his heart swell. Azaad would admit that at first it was her beauty which caught him but over the week they had spent together, he found himself admiring her more for her strength, self-resilence, personality and her determination. And even though they were traveling to resurect the one Fuli truly loved from the dead, Azaad would not change a thing.

"Cold?" He decided to ask, nonchalantly of course.

Fuli shot him a glare. "No." And yet, her teeth were chattering.

Azaad cocked an eyebrow, "Are you sure about that? It *is* cold. It is not as though we were made for snow and ice." He wasn't lying; he was also extremely cold.

"I'm fine!" Fuli snapped. "Just- just leave me alone!"

Azaad sighed. *That went well.*

"I'm going to find Kiara," He decided and got up quickly once the tension became too much. "See if she is alright."

He walked out of the little comfort the cave provided into the wind. He wandered around for a while until he discovered Kiara heading in his direction.

"Did you find anything?" He questioned as they began walking back to the cave.

"No," Kiara sighed. "I knew I wouldn't. What could live here?"

Azaad looked at her curiously, "Why did you go then?"

Kiara gave a small smile, "I know I shouldn't but... I can see you like her, Azaad. I just wanted to give you some time alone."

Azaad was surprised to say the least. The guy they were saving, Kion, was Kiara's brother. Why would she be smiling and leaving for Azaad to attempt to make a connection with Fuli?

Finally, his curiosity got the better of him, "Why?" He asked dumbly.

The princess sighed, "Azaad, Fuli has been alone for a long time. She was abandoned as a cub and spent most of her cubhood alone. Then, she met Kion and the rest of our friends. They became her family. Kion was Fuli's best friend. She blames herself for what happened to him. She refuses to let anyone else in, fearing that she will be the cause of their deaths too."

Azaad was shocked by the new information. *She was abandoned?*

She blamed herself?

"But... why does she do that?"

Kiara shrugged, "Fuli is a mystery only one animal was able to figure out. And he's dead."

"But," Azaad wondered why he had so many questions. "We are about to save him. Why let me try now?"

Kiara looked down, her ears folding, and even stopped walking. Realization dawned on the cheetah male. "You do not think it will work." He stated rather than questioned.

The princess sighed and shook her head. "I want it too." She whispered. "Believe me, I do. But... it goes against everything I've ever been taught. Besides, the dead," She gulped. "Their journies in the circle of life are complete, and they should stay that way. I'm here to protect Fuli, hope this works, and guide us back home before it's too late to stop Uchafu. But if this does not work, she will need someone to lean on... someone to love."

"Love?" Azaad asked, even more surprised. "Me?"

Kiara looked up at him and smiled, "Perhaps. Just give her time."

***

When the two arrived back at the cave, they found Fuli fast asleep, shivering in the cold.

Kiara smiled cheekily and nudged the other cheetah towards her. Azaad's eyes widened.

Kiara shrugged, "Just pretend you rolled over to her." Without another word, the princess curled into her own ball and closed her eyes.

Carefully and very nervously, Azaad lay down beside the cheetah female, their fur touching, and closed his eyes, hoping he wouldn't wake up to a slit throat. It didn't take him long to fall asleep by Fuli's side.

As the night went on, the two moved closer to one another in their sleep until their bodies were touching. They kept each other warm throughout the night, without a single shiver or a scary dream.

***

Hey guys! So... a chapter! It's short but it's progress, right? XXX

eleven

The morning sun slid through the cracks in the cave, streaming inside in light beams that reflected throughout the cave. The lioness princess continued to sleep soundly, finding comfort from the sun in the chilly morning. The cheetah male, too, remained fast asleep, content in his own warmth he gained beside the cheetah female.

Fuli was the first and only one disturbed by the sun. She groaned softly in her sleep and blinked her eyes open, taking a moment to process where she was. It was warm, if not for the little bit of wind that swept in through the entrance of the cave, and she felt more relaxed than she had in a longer time than she could remember.

Her thoughts started returning of the last weeks: the prophecy, the threat of Uchafu, their journey to the Temple of Life and the cheetah male sleeping soundly beside her.

Wait.

Suddenly very awake, Fuli jumped six feet into the air and scampered backwards against the wall, her fur puffed out and her breaths uneven. Millions of thoughts raced through her mind, and even she could not keep up.

Meanwhile, Azaad's head hit the ground with a thud, startling him awake. He was very displeased with what he found when he opened his eyes.

"WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU DOING?!" Fuli screamed in anger and embarrassment.

"I-I-" The cheetah male stuttered for words, trying to remember the story Kiara had provided him the previous night. "W-what d-do you mean?"

"YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN!" Fuli continued to yell, waking up a sleepy princess.

Kiara groaned and rolled over, covering her ears with her paws.

"TELL ME!"

Azaad glanced between his female counterpart and the princess, stressing. "I- It was in my sleep!"

"Sure." Fuli said sarcastically, her nose flaring with fury. "TELL ME THE TRUTH!"

"Fine!" Azaad gave in, standing up quickly. "You were cold and-"

"NEVER-" Fuli stomped up to his face, glaring at him with eyes that could cut a hyena's vocal cords loose. "-EVER. DO. THAT. AGAIN."

Azaad nodded quickly, biting his lip. "Sorry." He murmured.

Fuli huffed angrily and turned around, slapping his face with her tail. "KIARA GET UP!" She yelled. Even Kiara listened to an angry Fuli.

And so, their hike to the top of the mountain began.

***

They had been walking up a slippery ice slope for a little over an hour now. The snow was melting enough to make their journey even more difficult in the rays of the sun. Even so, the trio were glad for the bit of warmth and the absence of the icy wind. Although Azaad was covered in a pile of snow which had fallen from above them. That was Fuli's only amusement.

She could not stop thinking about that morning; how she woke up so content and warm next to Azaad, and she tried to push down the buzzing feeling in her stomach that came whenever she thought of it.

Fuli was so distracted by her thoughts that she didn't notice the scenery change until Azaad said, "Hey Fuli?"

The cheetah rolled her eyes, "What?" She snapped.

"Look at this." Kiara added.

Fuli huffed and turned around, walking back to where the two of them had stopped a few feet back on the path. She followed their gazes and her jaw dropped. "Is that...?"

"Yes." Azaad said factually, all sense of jest missing from his features. To be honest, it quite disturbed the young cheetah, as she had grown used to his constant banter. "That," Azaad continued. "Is a papaya."

Fuli shook her head and glared at the ripe fruit that grew from complicated vines and brambles in the side of the mountain. How was it growing?

"How?" Kiara asked, voicing her friend's thoughts.

Azaad answered in a whisper, "We're getting close. The Temple's energy must be affecting the life around it. It... it works."

***

Hours later, and the top of the mountain was coming into view. It was almost sunset and the cold winds had returned, burning the trio of animals through their thin coats. Rest assured, animals like them were not meant for the cold.
Each of their own thoughts raced.

When they finally reached the peak of the snow land, they were awed and stilled into silence by the stone temple crafted into the mountain, as though it was a part of the Earth itself. It was like a gift from the Great Kings.

Azaad was the first to draw his eyes away from the monument itself. He looked at the doors towering over them, each carved with intricated details of lines, suns, paw prints and other shapes.

Kiara gulped. This was a chance to have her brother back, for him to be returned to the world of the living. When she was a cub, she took her cub brother for granted, always teasing and often belittling or making fun of him with her friends. She couldn't remember ever properly telling him that she loved him, even in his last hours. She

wished she had. Perhaps now she could. Even if she could just get a glimpse of him, she would pray to the Great Kings every day for her whole life.

Meanwhile, Fuli was struggling to get her lungs to breathe and her legs to move. Something was holding her back, but she could not fathom what. At the same time, all she wanted to do was see him - Kion- and tell him... tell him what? She had dreamed of this happening for years, even when all of the odds were against it ever happening, but now that she was here, she was hesitating.

"Come on," Azaad's husky whisper slashed through the wind, calling the felines from their thoughts. He stepped ahead first, taking care to watch his step as he neared the giant doors. Kiara and Fuli exchanged looks before following.

Azaad stopped in front of the doors, looking up at them. He was sure he saw a carving of a meerkat, warthog and lion walking on a log in front of the moon. How odd.

"We have to get the doors open." He said, looking over them once again.

"How?" Kiara asked, also looking. There was no way visible to their eyes.

"Push it." Fuli said quietly. The other two looked at her, confused.

"How do you know?" Azaad asked cruiously.

Fuli grinned and gestured to the floor. The snow at their feet had melted, revealing words in an ancient language which they all recognized as: "*Push to enter."*

"Oh." Azaad said shortly.

Fuli burst out laughing. Why, even she didn't know. Perhaps this adventure was finally the one which would send her over the edge of madness and sanity.

She cleared her throat, her laughter drowning out quickly. Kiara and Azaad both smirked in both confusion and relief at hearing the

cheetah laugh. Actually, Azaad thought, this was the first time he had heard her laugh at all. It was beautiful, like... the cat version of a swallow's song. Okay, that sounds weird but anyone could get what he's trying to say.

Fuli took the lead. She pushed herself up on her back paws, pressing against the wood with her front paws and started pushing. The doors creaked.

Kiara broke out into a grin and joined her friend, pushing herself up into Fuli's position. The doors gave another crackly creak.

Azaad shrugged and smiled. Despite what this victory would mean, he would never put his own desires before what another wanted. Especially if that someone was Fuli. Even in the face of all her flaws and broken pieces and angry outbursts, Azaad was sure that it would not change.

So, he too pushed with all of his might. The doors scraped against the stone floor with deafening squeaks, causing the felines to flinch. However, they kept going until the doors had been opened wide enough for them to fit through one at a time.

"Well?" Kiara asked, out of breath. "Ready?"

***

Heyy!! Update!!
We're going on 7.8K soon!! I'm so happy!! Thanks beautiful people ❤
❤

twelve

"Well?" Kiara asked softly. "Ready?"

Fuli could practically feel her heart about to beat out of her chest and run away with unmatched speeds. Kiara's words barely fazed the young cheetah as she stared through the gap in the doors into the darkness on the other side. Whatever was in that darkness could restore any dreams of love and hope she once had.

The thought gave a sharp tug at her heartstrings. Fuli found her eyes seeking out the other cheetah beside her, the one who had clearly been trying to hard to break down the walls to her head and heart. However, she could not allow that. If something happened to him, if he died because of her, just like everyone else she loved, if she could not protect him, she would truly become a broken, flat soul walking the surface of the Earth.

Fuli was surprised she was even thinking like this. She hated Azaad. Hated his jokes, hated his laugh, hated his eyes, hated his smile, hated his personality, hated his warmth. Right?
Yes. No. Yes.
Maybe.
Whatever the answer may be, Fuli had no time to decide for here they were: the Temple of Life.

Forcing her sleeping limbs to move, Fuli slowly followed Kiara and Azaad into the darkness. After a mere ten steps, they were consumed by darkness except for the little light from the doors which illuminated little to nothing of the stone, freezing cold cave.

"What are we supposed to do?" Kiara's voice rang out from somewhere to Fuli's left, sounding so close yet so far.

As though Kiara's voice had set off a surprise stampede, light suddenly filled the cave. Fuli's eyes adjusted to the warm light while taking in the cave. It was massive and round with drawings lining the walls in lines, circles and other shapes. There were

sculptures made from the same stone as the walls, crafted into different animals, each holding a torch of fire. There was an ape, a lion, a zebra, an ostritch and so many others, even a hyena. The roof of the room was round and leading up like a cone, the top submerged in never-ending darkness. However, what caught Fuli's eyes was not a statue or a flame but the large round podium in the centre of the room. It was at least a foot higher than the ground with ancient markings scrawled along the sides, reading an old text which even Fuli could not decipher.

"What does that say?" She asked, though in the large space her voice sounded hollow and echoey.

Azaad stepped forward from beside her, his handsome features sunken into a frown.

Wait, handsome?

Before Fuli could think on it, said handsome cheetah started speaking, his voice shaking with a nervous edge. "It says that this is the Temple of Life." He explained. "We're in the right place."

"Why is it so cold in here?" Kiara asked.

"Because," Azaad explained. "The power of life has yet to be activated. Only at its roots in the ground is there life."

"Like the papaya." Fuli agreed.

He nodded, "Exactly. It says here that to start the process of activation, two loved ones of the lost hero must stand in front of the trees. Trees?"

"Those!" Kiara said, gesturing to two opposite sides of the room. Sure enough, a tree was drawn on each side of the room, identical, each parallel to the podium. "It must be."

Azaad nodded in agreement. "I think you are right. Go on, then, stand in front of the trees."

While Kiara sped off to the one on the left side, Fuli took her time, gazing at the carefully drawn tree with uncertainty.

"Fuli?" Azaad's calm voice called.

She looked at him, her eyes soft and slowly brimming with tears. "I-I can't." She stuttered.

Azaad's frown deepened in worry as he approached her, standing in front of her and bending down to look into her eyes when her face sunk to the floor. "What do you mean?" He asked gently, no tone of frustration or agression unlike Fuli thought there would be. She only saw worry in his olive eyes. "What is wrong?"

Fuli shook her head, biting her tongue. "I can't do it- I don't know why but-" She cut her sentence off, stifling a sob.

"Hey," Azaad gently cooed and when Fuli felt his warm body press against hers comfortingly, she did not move away. She accepted his embrace, her walls clattering down. Azaad said nothing for no words were needed. For the first time in a very long time, Fuli felt as though she had just been welcomed home.

Finally, Fuli moved away, blushing under her fur. Azaad smiled kindly, no hint of embarassment in his features. "You don't have to do it." He said softly.

The female cheetah took in a steady breath, saying, "Yes, I do. But... what if he hates me?"

"Why would he? There is no reason for him to."

Fuli had an answer for him. However, instead of admitting it, she shrugged her shoulders, nibbling on the inside of her cheek nervously.

"Exactly," Azaad said. "He loved you, and he'd be a fool of a prince if he does not again." He added confidently.

Fuli let out an unsteady breath as she hesitantly moved away from Azaad to her position in front of the tree, whispering words to herself: *What if I'm the fool*?

Once she reached her place and turned around again, Azaad quickly turned his head away from her, letting out a sad sigh, and

continued to read the text which he somehow understood. "Now," He said loud enough for them to hear. "Say his name and think of the happiest memories of him."

The felines took this into consideration before nodding and thinking through their vast memories of the dead prince. Fuli thought back to the time he told her he loved her, but the memory ended far too unhappily for it to do the job. She thought back to the day that Kion asked her to become part of the guard but even that was not happy enough.

Finally, she found a long forgotten memory in the back of her mind.

"Hey, Fuli?" Kion asked one night, about two weeks before he died. They were the last two of the guard in the cave, the rest all home with their families. Since Fuli didn't have one of those, not by blood, she stayed in the Guard's den during the night, Kion usually staying up a little longer with her before heading up to bed with his pride. "What do you think will happen in the future?"

Fuli, just a cub at the time, didn't know. Her vision included running around the Pride Lands happily without having to worry about the hyenas, Zira's constant threats or Scar's continuous attempts at taking over the Pride Lands and killing them all. Despite the reality of possibilities always edging in her mind, Fuli wanted to imagine that it would all work out right in the end.

She shrugged in response, "I don't know, but I know we'll win. Why do you ask?"

This time, Kion shrugged, resting his head on his front paws as he stared up through the open roof at the glistening stars. "Not sure, just wondering I guess."

"What do you want?" Fuli found herself asking.

Kion frowned. "Peace," he said. "And... and I want you to be happy. Whatever happens, promise me you will be happy."

At the time, Fuli did not particularly find this an odd request so she nodded easily. "Sure, as long as you do too."

Kion smiled, "I'll be happy with peace."

Fuli found herself smiling at the memory. There was no laughter to it, nothing to make it particularly special other than the promise she had made that she had forgotten about. Only that. A promise of happiness.

When she opened her eyes, however, reality came washing over her once again. She was not sure whether this was good, or whether it would ruin everything she had perhaps gained.

On the podium before her, shimmering lights seemed to be flying together like a magnetic. It was warmer than before. On the floor of the podium, a shadow was forming over four yellow paws as fur and body grew and reformed like magic.

Then a shout tore through the air.

Fuli ripped her eyes away from the center of the room, widening as they landed on the figure standing across the room over Kiara's unconscious form while Azaad was nowhere to be found. Her eyes hardened in the feline's direction, narrowing menacingly. "Hatari."

The leopard looked at her uncomfortably, quivering slightly under her deadly glare. It was known throughout the Pride Lands and even beyond that Fuli, the leader of the Lion Guard, had a ferocious glare, enough to suit her title, but Hatari had never been on the receiving end of such a hate-filled look. He felt guilty - Kiara was his future-queen after all, and Fuli was his friend and leader - but he could no longer stand for the exclusion he had been feeling for all these years. He had made his choice, albeit too soon to be good for his own health, but he would take the consequences of his choices.

"Hello, Fuli." He said coldly.

"What are you doing here? Where did you come from?"

"We have been following you for weeks, Fuli. We know all about this place and the power which it holds."

Fuli remembered the words of the sloth: in the paws of an evil-doer,

the Temple of Life is no good. With a stunning slap of realization, Fuli realized she had done just that.

"Whose 'we'?" She asked, hoping she didn't look as panicked as she felt.

Hatari straightened his posture as he proudly announced his boss's name, "Uchafu."

Fuli's eyes narrowed further than possibly. "Why? Why did you betray us?"

"I betrayed you?" Hatari asked in outrage. "You fired me! Besides, I've felt like an outcast for years. I was never able to replace your stupid prince."

"Shut up." Kiara murmured, rising to her feet enough to lunge at Hatari's legs, much to Fuli's surprise. The two started rolling around on the floor, biting and scratching.

Fuli looked back at the podium where a body was formed up to the waist. She could see the bottom outlines of the lion guard mark on the forming shoulder and the beginnings of a lucious red mane. Kion.

"Fuli!"

The cheetah looked away in time to see Azaad tackle Hatari, who was lunging straight for her. Fuli ducked instinctively, hugging the floor to keep her head from being removed by the violent claws and teeth from Azaad and Hatari's fighting.

Over the battle, Azaad shouted, "Finish it!"

Stunned by his acts of protection, Fuli nodded absently and turned around, finding Kiara half standing on the other side of the podium. There was a bump on her head, a few scratches around her body and she purposefully kept her weight off one of her front legs but other than that, the princess was fine, too busy concentrating on the forming body of her dead brother to care about her own health. Fuli felt similarly, except that she longed to look back at the battle raging behind her.

Shaking her head, Fuli focused her mind on the promise.

Kion.

Kion.

Kion.

thirteen

Azaad and Hatari rolled and rolled, claws and teeth glimmering in the feint light the torches provided, blood following their trail of battle around the room as Fuli and Kiara focused on their task: bringing back the lost prince, the one reforming before their very eyes.

"You'll never win," Hatari growled between snarls. "Our army is too strong."

"Army?" Azaad questioned, pawing the leopard hard in the face, sending him staggering backwards against the wall. "How does a simple leopard like you find an army?"

Hatari grinned. "I didn't. I have an ally. Together, we will rule the Pride Lands!"

Azaad scoffed and made a gesture of looking around at the empty space. "If you and your friend are so close, where are they then?"

"He'll be here." Hatari said, although Azaad was happy to note that there was a tone of discouragement in his voice as the leopard looked around warily. "He will. He's got a plan."

"Hm," Azaad hummed. "It doesn't look like it. If he was, he would have come out by now to stop them," he looked over at the concentrating females. "From completing the ritual."

By now, the prince's entire body had formed on the podium, shining and glimmering as brightly as the sun did in the middle of the desert lands.

Hatari glanced at the figure of Prince Kion nervously, cursing under his breath. He looked around for a way to work around this as Azaad inched closer to him, ready to take him down for once and for all.

"Kion." Fuli's voice cut through the air, calling everyone's attention - well, most of them.

She gingerly approached the podium that the prince was standing on, his eyes slowly blinking open to reveal their natural maroon color. "Fuli? Is that you?" His voice was low and gravelly and hoarse from disuse, but it was his.

"Is it... is it you?" Fuli asked unsurely.

Kion nodded, looking down at himself in surprise. "What happened?"

Kiara appeared at Fuli's side, looking up at her little brother as he attempted to remember what happened before the vague whiteness that clouded his mind.

"Nothing that I cannot fix."

Everyone's attention snapped to Uchafu standing in front of the large double doors at the entrance held open by two elephants. The two cheetahs and lioness bared their teeth and claws while the resurrected prince was just confused. He strolled inside, oozing arrogance with a Zira-like smirk on his face.

He laughed evilly. "As you can see, Hatari was right: I do have an army. And I will use it to take over the Pride Lands and put my mother and father back on their rightful thrones after I bring them back to life."

Fuli's eyes widened. "You can't do that!"

"Oh, can't I? Who says so, little Cheetah?"

She growled, showing her fangs as she got into a position to attack. "Me."

With that, they attacked.

***

The fight went on for what felt like forever. Enemies were felled

with the roar of the ancestors and the sheer hatred running through Fuli's veins for interrupting something that should have been so grand. Blood and fluff balls of fur covered the ground, keeping anyone from seeing the floor. Fuli and Azaad had wordlessly started working in sync as they fought their way towards their targets: Uchafu and Hatari. With a mere glance and a nod, Azaad knew that Fuli had no intention of letting anyone else put an end to the son of Scar and Zira other than her, and he knew not to stop her. With a smile of encouragement, Azaad tackled Hatari away from the large lion, the two rolling to the side to continue their fight from earlier. Meanwhile, Uchafu grinned maliciously and turned to face the cheetah. "This is a dangerous game to play, little cheetah. Why don't you run off back to the Pride Lands and leave that little prince behind; it wouldn't be the first time, would it?"

Fuli bared her fangs, "You underestimate me."

"I just know your type." They began to circle one another.

The cheetah smirked. "Then you should know that my type will not rest until you join your parents in their graves in the pits of hell." Without further hesitation, she pounced at him, claws and teeth extended to match that of the lion's. Growls and hissing filled the chamber and the sounds of other fighting ceased as the animals turned to see who would win. Kiara stood with her brother, panting, watching her best friend fight. Even Hatari and Azaad paused.

Kion easily caught Azaad watching with more than just concern for her winning but concerned as a whole for her well-being over victory. He hadn't been revived for more than fifteen minutes; yet he could see that he wasn't actually needed here at all and, despite the odd sinking feeling in his heart, knew it was for the best - for the balance of the circle of life to continue.

He blew out a small breath in a silent whistle, watching as light blue sparkling dots flew through the air, dodging bodies without anyone but the young lioness princess noticing. "What are you doing?" She whispered, eyebrows furrowing in concern.

Kion smiled at her. "I wasn't going to last here on Earth for long,

Kiara. None of you need me - look at her," Kiara followed his gaze to where Fuli, surrounded by the blue mist, had pinned the larger and stronger male lion to the ground. Kiara nodded slowly and looked back at Kion questioningly. "This temple was made to aid, Kiara, not to resurrect the dead permanently."

With dawning horror, Kiara realized what her brother meant. "No!" Her voice was swept up soundlessly in the cave of growls. Tears filled her eyes as she looked up at her baby brother, someone she had wished to see for so long, to have him returned to her life. The impossible came true. And now the impossible gift was being torn away again in the cruelest of manors. "No..."

Kion shook his head, his full mane ruffling itself. "I love you, my sister."

His figure fizzled out of existence.

Before Kiara could even react, even blink, a long deafening roar resounded throughout the cavern, making the walls shake and tiny bits of rock and dirt fall from the ceiling. The stone table cracked in two. The animals scattered, stampeding out of the doors which collapsed out onto the ground in ruins. The life inside the cave died and the warmth left as though it had never been there at all and, in the center of it all, was the cheetah Fuli, panting as the roar of the old guardians of the Pride Lands dwindled in her throat. Beneath her, Uchafu was still, blood dripping from his ears and nose onto the floor.

Fuli cursed loudly and then asked, "What was that..."

Kiara swallowed, glancing at the place where her brother had been standing just moments before. "He gave you his power. He gave you the strength you needed."

Fuli followed Kiara's gaze and sighed sadly at the realization. She climbed off the limp body beneath her and hung her head. Funnily enough, though, there was no sadness. No misery. Not even grief. The little blue spark of energy in the special place reserved for Kion in her heart was too warm to let her grieve again. In fact, she felt lighter than she had in a very long time.

"You do realize that you just used the roar, do you not?" Azaad questioned, speaking for the first time, his paw still firmly place on Hatari's back to keep his face in the floor.

Fuli chuckled softly, her smile making his heart flutter. She glanced up, surprised to find a hole at the top of the mountain, showing her a clear view of the blue sky above them. "Yeah. Turns out, all I needed was a little nudge."

Hatari groaned beneath Azaad's paw. "That's way too convenient."

The other three felines shouted in sync: "Shut up!"

They fell into silence, all silently thinking in their own little worlds. Kiara thought of her brother and realized she felt lighter knowing his fate - a star in the skies. What else could he be?
Azaad watched Fuli almost in a daze -although he never felt himself straying from the feeling of pleasure to be squashing the stupid leopard's face with his clawed foot. Watching her, he fell even more in love with her, if it was possible.
And Fuli? Well, she dropped her head and focused on the spark in her heart, reignited with a fire she hadn't felt in many, many years - if ever at all. She felt stronger in mind and body. She had proven herself.

"There it is!" A distant voice shouted from outside, drawing all their attentions to the knocked-down doors. Figures appeared in the shadows. Fuli grinned widely at her friends, her team - her family.

As soon as they had those who they had spent weeks searching for in their sight, Bunga collapsed to the floor, exhausted. "Finally..." He panted.

epilogue

[image]

Fuli. The leader of the Pride Guard. The first leader to be anything but a lion and -truly- one of the fiercest creatures to have ever lived.
That was her legacy.
She had long since proven it to herself and to anyone else who dared to stand against her.
She was happy.

Fuli sat beside her husband with a graceful smile on her furry face, resting her head in the crook oh his neck as he snored lightly. She chuckled softly. It used to drive her crazy but now she found herself unable to sleep without the sound.

"Mama, Mama!" She looked up at the sound of her cub's shout, ears flicking in motherly instinct. Tria frowned at her from beside the watering hole where the second two cubs, Ry and Nina, wrestled one another in the water, soaking wet. Fuli knew she should be mad, furious, that her cubs decided to play in the water after being told not to get their coats wet -the King and Queen would be heading this way, after all!- but found herself laughing easily. Ry and Nina paused their play and grinned innocently at her while Tria pouted that her siblings didn't get in trouble.

Soon, the royal family joined them at the lake, as well as the other members of the Pride Guard. The cubs and the hatchlings played in the water while the adults watched, careful of their surroundings. Paranoid as they might be by now, they still enjoyed themselves in the sun.

As the great circle of warmth decended behind the horizon before them, the families started heading back to their dens: Ono's to the trees, Bunga's to the dens, Beshte's up the river, Kovu and Kiara's to Pride Rock and Fuli and Azaad's to the Guard's lair where they spent their nights. The cubs fell asleep quickly, snuggled between their parents while the two cheetahs smiled at them fondly.

"I love you," Azaad reminded her as usual. Fuli liked it; it made her feel special, as though she was more than just a protector of the lands.

She smiled. "I love you too."

Azaad fell asleep soon after that but Fuli found herself wide awake, staring out of the entrance to the cavern with a fond smile, watching the stars shimmer. The brightest caught her eye as it shone, as though a certain young lion was winking down at her from the heavens, reminding her that he, too, loved her, and that he would never leave her side, as long as she remembered to wink back up at him.

One day, one of her cubs would take over from her. They would build a new guard of protectors to keep the Pride Lands safe. But until then, Fuli was content to do it herself, to make a better place for them all to grow up in.

note

[image]

That's a wrap, people!

I apologize for the abrupt ending and the rubbish writing in the final two chapters but I honestly had no more motivation to keep writing and as it was so close to the end anyway, decided against keeping my lovely readers waiting any longer.

Thank you for all of the support I had while writing. I started this story during lockdown last year as an anchor. I know it sounds cliche, but it has helped me. Hopefully, somehow, it has for you too. On that note, I keep everyone who is struggling right now in my heart. I personally know people who recently lost their mother and that times are extremely difficult.
Know that, if no one else had told you today:

YOU ARE ENOUGH.
YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL.
YOU ARE STRONG.
YOU ARE IMPORTANT.
I LOVE YOU AND I AM SO PROUD OF YOU!

Even though this story is complete, my chats are always open.
I love you all.
xx.
V.